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CONTACT: Mark Shaffer, Director of Communications, (602) 771-2215

Willcox and Safford Become First Communities to Join ADEQ's Small Communities Compliance Assistance Program

PHOENIX (April 4, 2008) – Arizona Department of Environmental Quality Director Steve Owens announced today that the City of Willcox in Cochise County and the City of Safford in Graham County have become the first small municipalities in Arizona to participate in ADEQ's statewide program to help communities comply with state and federal environmental regulations.

ADEQ unveiled its Small Communities Environmental Compliance Assistance project in 2007 for small towns and special water and wastewater districts to sustain compliance with state and federal environmental laws and reduce the number of violations and enforcement actions.

The project was funded by a \$12,000 grant from the Environmental Council of States (ECOS) for the communities to develop Small Community Environmental Protection Plans (SCEPP) to improve compliance. Guidance materials, including a comprehensive manual, have been prepared to train small communities on environmental requirements and help with SCEPP development.

"We are very pleased that Willcox and Safford are leaders in this effort," Director Owens said. "We are committed to providing small communities with the assistance they need in light of their limited resources to comply with the various environmental laws. Our experience is that small communities want to do the right thing and just need a little help to do that. We hope that other small towns throughout Arizona will follow Willcox's and Safford's lead and take part in this program."

As part of the program, Willcox and Safford agree to disclose known environmental violations within the cities, request compliance assistance before enforcement actions begin, participate in compliance evaluation to identify violations and to promptly correct known violations. In so doing, the cities will be eligible for up to a 100 percent penalty reduction if they have future environmental violations.

"This is really a win-win for everyone," Owens said. "The environment and public health is protected by getting environmental problems identified and addressed, and the communities benefit by getting the compliance assistance they need and avoiding potentially costly penalties. The result will be increased compliance, enhanced relationships with small communities and a cleaner environment for all Arizonans."